

THAT WHICH IS CLAIMED:

We claim:

1. A system for rating a shipment comprising:
 - a database for storing shipment data comprising at least a first identifier associated with one good in the shipment,
 - the database storing a plurality of rating profiles,
 - each rating profile including at least a first descriptor of an item and a tariff code associated with the item; and
 - a processor capable of accessing the database and configured to determine a confidence level associated with a first rating profile selected from the database based in part on the first identifier,
 - the processor further configured to calculate a tariff amount associated with the first identifier based in part on the tariff code associated with the first rating profile,
 - the processor updating the shipment data in the database to include the tariff amount.
 2. The system of claim 1 wherein the first identifier comprises at least one selected from the group of a description of the good, a shipper of the good and an importer of the good.
 3. The system of claim 1 wherein the first descriptor comprises one from the group of a description of the item, a shipper of the item and an importer of the item.
 4. The system of claim 1 wherein the rating profiles comprise catalog rating profiles and historical rating profiles.
 5. The system of claim 1 wherein the first rating profile is selected based in part on the first descriptor.
 6. The system of claim 1 wherein the confidence level is determined by comparing the first identifier of the shipment data with the first descriptor of the first rating profile.

7. The system of claim 1 wherein the processor is further configured to compare the confidence level with a predetermined threshold value.
8. The system of claim 7 wherein the processor is further configured to receive user input to select the first rating profile if the confidence level is less than the predetermined threshold value.
9. The system of claim 1 wherein the processor is further configured to record in the shipment data the tariff code associated with the selected first rating profile.
10. The system of claim 1 wherein the tariff amount is calculated using a tariff rate associated with the tariff code.
11. A system for rating a shipment comprising:
 - a database for storing shipment data comprising at least a first identifier associated with one good in the shipment,
 - the database storing a plurality of rating profiles,
 - each rating profile including at least a first descriptor of an item and a tariff code associated with the item; and
 - a processor capable of accessing the database to retrieve the plurality of rating profiles based in part on the first identifier,
 - the processor configured to receive user input to select one rating profile from the retrieved plurality of rating profiles,
 - the processor further configured to calculate a tariff amount associated with the first identifier based in part on the tariff code associated with the selected rating profile and to store the tariff amount in the database.
12. The system of claim 11 wherein the first identifier is selected from the group comprising a description of the good, a part number of the good, a shipper of the good and an importer of the good.

13. The system of claim 12 wherein the first descriptor is selected from the group comprising description of the item, a part number of the item, a shipper of the item and an importer of the item.
14. The system of claim 11 wherein the rating profiles comprise either a plurality of catalog rating profiles or a plurality of historical rating profiles.
15. The system of claim 14 wherein the plurality of rating profiles are retrieved from the database based in part on comparing the first identifier of the shipment data with the first descriptor of an item in the rating profile.
16. The system of claim 11 wherein the processor is further configured to record the tariff code associated with the shipment data.
17. The system of claim 11 wherein the tariff amount is calculated using a tariff rate associated with the tariff code.
18. A system for supporting custom brokerage operations comprising:
 - a server storing a plurality of rating profiles, a plurality of rules, and shipment data, the shipment data comprising at least one item associated with a shipment; and
 - a workstation operatively coupled with the server over a communication network, the workstation capable of retrieving the shipment data from the server and calculating tariff amounts associated with each item in the shipment data by determining a tariff code from a selected rating profile associated with a determined confidence level,
 - the workstation selecting a rating profile determined in part using at least a first one of the plurality of rules and determining the confidence level associated with the selected rating profile,
 - the workstation updating the server with the tariff amount associated with each item in the shipment data.

19. The system of claim 18 wherein the workstation is characterized as either unattended or attended.
20. The system of claim 18 wherein a second one of the plurality of rules determines a confidence level associated with the selected rating profile.
21. The system of claim 20 wherein a third one of the plurality of rules defines an assisted rating procedure if the confidence level is below a threshold level.
22. The system of claim 21 wherein the assisted rating procedure involves receiving user input at an attended workstation determining the selection of a rating profile.
23. The system of claim 22 wherein a fourth one of the plurality of rules determines a language to use with the assisted rating procedures.
24. The system of claim 20 wherein the one of the plurality of rules defines the criteria for determining the selected rating profile.
25. The system of claim 24 wherein the criteria includes procedures for comparing an item description in the shipment data with a descriptor in the selected rating profile.
26. The system of claim 18 wherein the rules are implemented as a library of programming objects.
27. The system of Claim 18 wherein the server further comprises a data service interface for communicating with each workstation, said data service interface configured to respond to requests from each workstation to retrieve and load shipment data in the server.

28. A system for supporting brokerage operations comprising:
 - a processor configured to receive and process shipment data to generate an electronic declaration document,
 - the processor configured to store the electronic declaration document in a database operatively connected to the processor,
 - the processor configured to transmit the electronic declaration document;
 - a communications network operatively connected to the processor receiving the electronic declaration document transmitted from the processor; and
 - a customs processing computer operatively connected to the communications network capable of receiving the electronic declaration document,
 - the customs processing computer generating a customs clearance indication and communicating the customs clearance indication to the processor.
29. The system of claim 28 wherein the processor comprises a workstation operatively connected to the database capable of accessing the shipment data stored in the database, the workstation capable of transmitting the electronic declaration document to the database for storage.
30. The system of claim 29 wherein the workstation comprises a data service interface for communicating with the database,
 - the data service interface enabling the workstation to access the database, to transmit the electronic declaration document to the database,
 - the data service interface further enabling the workstation to update the database with the received customs clearance indication.
31. The system of claim 28 wherein the electronic declaration document includes at least one of a plurality of memory fields associated with an item quantity, an item description, an item value, and an item tariff code.

32. The system of claim 29 wherein the workstation further comprises a user interface comprising a set of screens for user selections, said screens capable of being translated and displaying data in a selected language.
33. The system of claim 29 wherein each workstation is configured to be capable of selecting a rating profile containing an identifier matching a descriptor of a good contained in the shipment data and calculating a tariff amount associated with the good using a tariff rate associated with the tariff code in the selected rating profile.
34. The system of claim 29 wherein the workstation is capable of transmitting the electronic declaration document to a customs clearance processing system, the workstation capable of receiving the clearance indication from the customs clearance processing system.
35. The system of claim 28 wherein the processor communicates the customs clearance indication to a package handling system.
36. The system of claim 33 wherein the processor communicates the customs clearance indication and the tariff amount to a computer generating a bill to a shipper.
37. A system for facilitating a shipment of a package comprising:
 - a database for storing shipment data associated with a shipment associated with at least one package;
 - a first processor capable of accessing the database to process the shipment data and configured to receive a customs clearance indication associated with the package,
 - the first processor further configured to communicate the customs clearance indication over a first communication network; and
 - a package handling system connected to the first communication network,
 - the package handling system capable of receiving the customs clearance indication associated with the package.

38. The system of claim 37 wherein the package handling system comprises a second database,
 - the second database storing the clearance indication,
 - the package handling system further accessing the second database upon scanning of a package.
39. The system of claim 38 wherein the scanning of the package occurs by detecting a radio frequency identifier tag affixed to the package.
40. The system of claim 38 wherein the scanning of the package occurs by detecting an optical bar code affixed to the package.
41. The system of claim 39 or 40 wherein the package handling system provides a clearance indication after scanning the package.
42. The system of claim 41 wherein the package handling system further comprises a second processor configured to determine the customs clearance indication associated with a package after the package handling system has scanned the package.
43. The system of claim 42 wherein the second processor communicates a scanning indication to the first processor after the scanning of the package.
44. The system of claim 37 wherein the first processor receives the customs clearance indication associated with the package from a customs processing system.
45. The system of claim 37 wherein the first processor is further configured to generate an electronic declaration document by processing the shipment data and generate a clearance request.

46. The system of claim 45 wherein the first processor is further configured to receive the customs clearance indication associated with the electronic declaration document in response to the clearance request.
47. A package handling system comprising:
 - a sensor detecting a package associated with a shipment, the sensor generating a package identification message;
 - a database storing a customs clearance status indication associated with the package;
 - a first processor configured to receive the package identification message from the sensor, the first processor capable of retrieving the customs clearance status indication from the database and determining that the package is cleared for delivery; and
 - a second processor operatively connected to the first processor, receiving the customs clearance status and communicating it to the first processor.
48. The system of Claim 47 wherein the sensor detects a package by optical scanning a label on the package.
49. The system of Claim 47 wherein the processor is further configured to provide an indication that the package is cleared for delivery after detecting the package.
50. The system of claim 49 wherein the indication is one from the group of an audible indication, generating a light, and displaying a message in human-readable form.
51. The system of Claim 47 wherein the second processor is operatively connected to a customs clearing processor, the customs clearing processor generating the customs clearance indication and transmitting it to the second processor.
52. The system of Claim 51 wherein the second processor is further configured to update the first processor upon receiving the customs clearance indication.

53. The system of claim 51 wherein the first processor searches the database for the customs clearance indication using a shipment identifier associated with a package identifier value contained in the package identification message.

54. The system of claim 49 wherein the processor controls a package sorting system based on the indication that the package is cleared for delivery.

55. The system of Claim 47 wherein the processor is further configured to determine either to hold or release delivery of the detected package based on the retrieved customs clearance indication associated with the detected package.

56. A method for processing shipment data comprising:
receiving shipment data pertaining to at least one item being imported into a country,
the shipment data comprising at least one of either item description data or item part number data;
processing the shipment data to identify a rating profile stored in a database, the rating profile including a tariff code and a product descriptor;
determining a confidence level of the identified rating profile with respect to the shipment data;
retrieving a confidence threshold level stored in the database;
selecting the tariff code associated with the rating profile if the confidence level equals or exceeds the confidence threshold level; and
determining a tariff amount associated with the one item,
the tariff amount calculated using at least a tariff rate associated with the tariff code and a value of the item.

57. The method of claim 56 wherein the confidence threshold level is determined by accessing one of a plurality of rules stored in the database.

58. The method of claim 57 where another one of the rules stored in the database defines criteria used to determine the confidence threshold level.
59. The method of claim 58 where the criteria to determine the confidence level is based in part on comparing at least one of either the item description data or item part number data with the product descriptor in the rating profile.
60. The method of claim 56 wherein the rating profile is one of a plurality of rating profiles associated with either a historical rating profile set or a catalog rating profile set.
61. The method of claim 56 wherein the product descriptor in the rating profile includes either or both of an item descriptor and item part number.
62. The method of claim 56 wherein the processing the shipment data to identify a rating profile involves comparing an importer identifier data with a subset of data in the rating profile.
63. The method of claim 56 further comprising:
 - displaying the identified rating profile on a monitor if the confidence level is less than the confidence threshold level; and
 - receiving user input regarding the selection of the tariff code associated with the displayed rating profile.
64. A method for rating a shipment of goods comprising:
 - receiving shipment data pertaining to an item, the shipment data including an item quantity, a value for the item, and at least one of either a item description or an item part code;
 - identifying a rating profile using at least one of either the item description or the item part code,
 - the rating profile containing at least either a product description or a product part number or both, the rating profile also including a tariff code;

determining a confidence level of the rating profile based on the correlation between either the item description, item part code, or both with the rating profile; selecting the rating profile if the confidence level is at or above a defined threshold; calculating a tariff amount associated with each good by using a subset of the shipment data, the selected rating profile, and a tariff rate associated with the selected rating profile; and storing the shipment data and the tariff amount in a database.

65. The method of claim 64 wherein the tariff rate is associated with the tariff code in the selected rating profile.

66. The method of claim 64 further comprising the step of: identifying a second rating profile and calculating a second confidence level if the first confidence level is below the defined threshold; and determining the second confidence level is at or above the defined threshold.

67. The method of claim 66 further comprising:
receiving user input regarding the selection of the second rating profile.

68. A method for processing customs clearance comprising:
receiving shipment data in a data processing system pertaining to at least one item imported into a country, the shipment data including a description, a quantity, and a value;
rating the shipment data to determine a tariff amount by accessing a database containing rating profiles associated with the at least one item imported into the country;
retrieving a first set of rules from the database for formulating a customs declaration document;
generating the customs declaration document based in part on the first set of rules, the tariff amount, and the shipment data;
communicating the customs declaration document to a customs broker; and

receiving a customs clearance indication from the customs broker clearing the item for importation.

69. The method of claim 68 wherein the first set of rules includes data communication parameters for communicating the customs declaration document to a customs broker in electronic form using an electronic data interchange (EDI) based interface.

70. The method of claim 68 wherein the customs declaration document is a paper based document.

71. The method of claim 68 further comprising communicating the customs clearance indication to a shipment handling system.

72. The method of claim 68 further comprising communicating the customs clearance indication to a billing computer system.

73. A method of processing customs clearance status data, comprising:
receiving shipment data associated with a shipment identifier, the shipment data received in a data processing system,
the shipment data including a description of an imported good, a value of the imported good, and a tariff code of the imported good;
determining parameters for interacting with a customs clearance data processing system;
generating an electronic customs declaration document;
communicating the electronic customs declaration document from the data processing system to the customs clearance data processing system;
receiving a clearance indication in the data processing system from the customs clearance data processing system indicating a shipment associated with the shipment identifier has cleared customs; and

communicating the clearance indication and the shipment identifier to a database server.

74. A method for processing a shipment comprising:
 - receiving at a first processor a customs clearance indication associated with a shipment;
 - transmitting the customs clearance indication from the first processor to a second processor using a communications network;
 - storing the customs clearance indication in a memory accessible to the second processor;
 - receiving a message at the second processor from a package handling system identifying a package associated with the shipment;
 - retrieving the customs clearance indication from the memory;
 - determining the customs clearance indication is associated with the package;
 - generating a message to the package handling system indicating the package has cleared customs; and
 - processing the package at the package handling system for delivery of the package.

75. The method of claim 74 wherein the package handling system comprises an optical scanner.

76. The method of claim 74 further comprising the steps of:
 - receiving at the first processor shipment data comprising at least one identifier of the good of the shipment;
 - selecting a rating profile to determine a tariff code associated with the good;
 - rating the shipment to determine a tariff amount;
 - generating an electronic declaration document; and
 - communicating the electronic declaration document to a customs processing system.